



CHANGES AND CHALLENGES - THE AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN LEFT IN DIALOGUE

Conference in Brussels, 13 – 15 October 2011, organized by
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Brussels and
the Africa Department of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Berlin

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Brussels in cooperation with the Transnational Institute and the World Forum for Alternatives held a conference entitled “Beyond the World Crisis”. At this conference we discussed divers topics like the productive forces and the necessary reshaping of the international economic order, food sovereignty and agrarian structures, the role of social movements, the environmental question and finally we raised the question whether we would simply see the rise of an undemocratic post-crisis era or witness the transformation towards a post-capitalist age. At the end of the conference the participants adopted jointly a resolution with the title “Building a New Global Solidarity”. This resolution closes with the words:

“The new global solidarity is built on the struggle of the victims of the dominant economic system, the nations of the South, which are the targets of imperialist policies, and the subaltern classes of the North and the South, either exploited or made vulnerable. It implies co-operation between the large regions of the world on the basis of complementarities. It requires the respect and the protection of the planet and a dialogue between the various cultures of the world. It means the realization of the common good of humankind. Global solidarity is the only hope for the future of humanity.

We have the numbers and the ideas. They still have the power. Let us seize it!”

Although a socialist alternative to capitalism seems to be more urgent than ever there are no easy answers to hyper-complex problems. Therefore, left and progressive forces (parties as well as movements and civil society organisations) need to embark on a process of

consultations – a real dialogue – in order to identify strategies of transformation and to organise joint actions for social and political change.

With this intent the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation together with its partners in Africa (members of left parties as well as civil society activists) and in co-operation with the Left Party in Germany »Die Linke« (and its representatives in the national and the European Assembly) started to organise biannual encounters between left activists from Europe and Africa. The first Conference, under the title »Crises Politics – Politics in Crises« was held on the 27 June 2009 in Berlin. The second conference entitled “Changes and Challenges – the African and European Left in Dialogue” was held between the 13th and the 15th of October 2011 in Brussels.

THE TRANSVERSAL TOPICS: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND THE ENERGY CHALLENGE

Donnez nous du vrai et pas d'artificiel,
On veut du fat du frais, et pas d'industriel
On veut du sain, du "sah" du produit naturel
Du bio du hallal et pas du commercial¹

The conference programme made it allowed for the discussion of many urgent topics. Due to the acceleration of the developments in the last years and months we had to rethink many of our own basic assumptions. The pressing issues of food sovereignty, climate change, and the energy challenge influence many policy areas where the Left is struggling in favour of the people. For that reason we discussed the issues of development and trade, sustainability, migration, the challenge of a democratic social change and the question of Geo-Politics, military and aid in the light of the most recent changes in the international dispensation. We finished with two sessions on the African awakening and the question how a self-centered development of the African societies can be secured. This last session provided a round-up of our common findings.

¹ All these texts have been taken from two different French Hip hop groups with pretty strong international(istic) background, both from their families and from their style & content: Le Ministère des affaires populaires & Keny Arkana. There is one English exception: Maroon Town



Picture from the march of the Indignados outside the conference

THE IMPACT OF THE REVOLUTIONS ON SUB-SAHARA, THE ACTORS OF THE REVOLUTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN LEFT IN THIS DEVELOPMENT

Affronter les conquistadors à Mexico
Enfermé dans les geôles de Salazar
Tomas Sankara au Burkina Faso
Vivre les révolutions de Simon Bolivar

In the public opening Rabiadou Diallo made the point that the recent revolutions in the Northern African states have also negative side impacts on the Sub-Saharan countries due to an influx of refugees, loss of transfer money, and especially due to the proliferation of weapons. These challenges have to be dealt with also at the international level as Sabine Lösing underlined. The Left in Europe has a particular task to cope with: it has to analyze these events, their trajectory and the involved actors in order to understand their potential influence on progressive policy changes. Accordingly the European Left has to support the revolutionary forces and to struggle against these European forces which work in favour of the reactionary camps in the respective countries. On the international level the 'European Neighborhood Policy' is just one example where the European Left has to defend its North African allies, as this policy has been changed towards a stronger emphasis of free trade recently. The influence of the European Union on the African Union and the attempts to build up armed intervention troops of the African Union were taken up later by Annette Groth, too. But before Samir Amin explained, in particular for the European participants, which socio-political camps struggle in Egypt for the heritage and future of the 'spring revolution' in 2011 he showed how economic reproduction goes hand in hand with social processes, a certain political culture and ideological language used by different groups. In this struggle for 'another future' the Left has to be aware of counter-revolutionary intentions

of foreign countries, because all involved foreign powers are against a truly revolutionary Egypt, as this would change the balance of power in the region.



DEVELOPMENT & TRADE, SUSTAINABILITY & FOOD SECURITY, THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION AND THE NEEDS OF THE CENTRAL CAPITAL

From the Pound to the Dollar; From the Dollar to the Pound
Lots of money in the world; Not enough to go around
A lot of greed a lot of need; A lot of debt another bet
Who will win this human race; third World you have a case
But they put you in your place While the lions they chase

In the conference the connections between international trade, development and national sovereignty were taken up and discussed from various angles. Rangarirai Machemedze emphasized the history of troublesome trade liberalizations in Africa and analyzed the current state of the negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreement between EU and the East African Community. While he argued that national programmes, only relying on import substitution do not help the states he emphasized that what would be needed instead are strategies where regionally integrated economies are build up. Infant industries have to be protected and any market liberalization needs to be applied only in sequenced ways. Therefore issues of international trade and democracy must be seen as deeply interconnected. National sovereignty is the sine qua non for any struggle in favour of food sovereignty and against complex processes that cause climate change. Gabi Zimmer underlined the interrelation between questions of food security and climate change. As more and more land is reclassified to agro fuel production and thus to non-sustainable forms of production there is a direct link between the right to food and climate change problems. Winfred Nyirahabineza gave enlightening insights into the interconnection of food production, development policies and climate change by using the example of Kalangala, an island in the Lake Victoria.

Chrystel le Moing and Masake Kane lectured on the political economy of migration. Chrystel le Moing stressed the point that migration is willingly used by the European capitalists to increase the profitability of their business. For that reason migration from Africa to the European economies is used to get access to (illegalized) cheap labour and to ease the impact of demographic changes to the economies in Europe. Masake Kane established a structural connection between the capitalist world system with its different stages of development and the political system. These inherent differences in one global system lead to a permanent pressure for migration which works in favour of the capital accumulation in the dominant capitalist economies.



PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC SOVEREIGNTY AS THE NEW PARADIGM OF WORLDWIDE STRUGGLE

SDF, chômeurs, ouvriers,
Paysans, immigrés, sans papiers,
Ils ont voulu nous diviser,
Et faut dire qu'ils y sont arrivés.
Tant qu'c'était chacun pour sa gueule,
Leur système pouvait prospérer,
Mais fallait bien qu'un jour on s'éveille
Et qu'les têtes s'remettent à tomber

Ashok Subron introduced strategies against these destructive policies. A new paradigm has emerged in the last decade of popular struggles in the Third World. It is the struggle for people's democratic sovereignty, which is not restricted to individual human rights, but also includes strong common rights, like self-determination of the people. Ashok Subron thus supports the earlier mentioned idea that sovereignty is a precondition for the Left to put progressive political projects in practice. He also linked the current world situation to the challenge of demilitarization, as economic crises have always been times of military

confrontations. For that reason Ashok Subron is much in favor of worldwide joint protests against military foreign bases. Daniel Cirera pointed to the fact that the neoliberal project has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the public and that rifts and cracks can be found in the hegemonic block so that the Left enjoys some room to maneuver.



THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENERGY PRODUCTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENTS PROSPECTS

C'est fou comme ils sont protégés
Tous nos riches et nos puissants.
Y'a pas à dire ça peut aider
D'être l'ami du président.
Chers camarades, chers "électeurs",
Chers "citoyens - consommateurs",
Le réveil à sonné, il est l'heure,
D remettre à Zéro les compteurs.

Annette Groth and Asume Osuoka introduced the complex of geo-politics, the military and aid to the audience. While Annette Groth focused on the militarization of the European foreign policy and the bad reputation European countries have in this regard in African countries, in particular due to their decade long support of dictators. Asume Osuoka approached the theme from a different angle and demanded broader political economic analyses. His main argument is that due to specific relations of production in the oil energy sector, a small elite can steal the surplus and use its power to eliminate any autonomous civil society in Nigeria. Due to the overwhelming political and financial power of the national elite attempts to build up a national economy or work in favour of national food production can only succeed if these coincide at least with the interests of some small sections of the national elite. Thus the question of energy production is directly linked to the question of

climate change, food sovereignty and any democratic self-determination of the Nigerian people.



ETHNICITY – A BLIND SPOT IN THE LEFT DISCOURSE

Au royaume de la manipulation et du silence ça parle de mixité de mélange
D'échanges et de différences, de tolérance, laïcité pour se donner bonne
Conscience alors que la haine raciale sévit dans la plus grande indifférence
Franchement tu veux savoir ce que j'en pense c'est qu'elle est belle,
Elle est belle la France

Asume Osuoka also brought up a topic which was also brought up before by Ashok Subron. Both speakers emphasized the urgent need for the Left to come up with own approaches how to deal with ethnicity, its construction, and its influence on the political arena. Both gave ample examples for the fact that marginalized people got mobilized for progressive policies and actions when the appeal to them was made in “ethnic languages”. So it is now up to the Left to find ways to deal with this phenomenon.



FAR MORE THAN ARAB SPRING: AFRICAN AWAKENINGS

On a dit NON! On a le Nombre! Jeunesse du monde...
Ce sera plus jamais sans nous! Dignité et Conscience
On est des milliards à vouloir faire tourner la roue dans l'autre sens!
Des pays oubliés jusqu'aux oubliés de nos pays
Marginal des pays riches, qu'attends-tu pour désobéir?!
Mon rap prône l'insurrection, car plus question de laisser faire
La Lutte est nécessaire!

Firoze Manji tried to put the 'Arab Spring' in a broader picture. Instead of something solely Arabic it would be much more justified to talk about a real and lasting African Awakening. Apart from this he emphasized that the Left has to prepare itself for a long and open period where the left movement has to be clever and smart. Manji especially built on earlier discussions on the military threats in times of economic turmoil.



AID & SOLIDARITY: SHALL THE TWAIN NEVER MEET?

Il s voudraient nous éduquer, eux, qui manquent de sagesse
Eux, qui sans intérêt ne savent pas faire un geste!
Il s nous parlent de respect, mais il s flinguent notre Terre
Disent se battre pour la Paix, et pour ça, font la guerre!
Camarade, combat le doute, car il s aimeraient te corrompre

Last not least the “evergreen” of Aid Effectiveness was taken up by Yash Tandon, but on the somewhat unusual perspective of how we, the Left from Africa and Europe can deal with each other on equal footing. The issue at stake is the unequal political and economic relationship between these continents due to the financial “Aid” programmes. Yash Tandon’s arguments were that money structures willy-nilly the relationship between two groups, when money always flows in one direction. Money being paid means always the creation of debt. Usually it is credit creation, but in the case of social movements, intellectuals etc. it is more often “intellectual credit” in the form of compliance. Against this background Yash Tandon argues strongly in favour of a real national sovereignty for the countries of Africa as a precondition for any self defined socio-economic development.

The second Euro-African Dialogue Conference of the Left has yielded many results in detail. However the major outcomes could be seen in two regards. First it has further contributed to an immersed common understanding not only of the particular conditions under which the different movements and political activists struggle on both continents. Above this it has created an atmosphere seriousness with respect to different positions and particular interests as well as political dilemmas under which we are forced to work. Only an improved understanding of the various challenges and openness to differing political views and positions will enable us to identify the basis for joint actions and to forge compromises.

The conference brought together political grass-root activists, academics, and politicians (of the European and the German Parliament). It provided the well received opportunity of

three days of dialogue in mutual respect and paved the way for joint actions in future. In two years time, 2013, the next biannual conference will follow and will certainly address the then prevailing political changes and challenges.

